DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 082 145 CS 000 738

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TITLE The Relationship Between Reading Medium and Prose Writing.
PUB DATE Feb 73
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Assn. (New Orleans, Feb. 26-Mar. 1, 1973)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Basic Reading; *Composition (Literary); Grade 1; Grade 2; *Initial Teaching Alphabet; Reading; *Reading Instruction; *Reading Research; Reading Skills; Vocabulary; Writing Skills

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of two methods of reading instruction on children's ability to write original compositions. The subjects for this study were 684 first and second graders. Of the 293 first grade children, 130 were receiving their reading instruction in i.t.a., while the remaining 163 children were working in traditional orthography. All of the 391 second graders were in traditional orthography reading programs using a basal reader for reading instruction. All of the subjects wrote two compositions which were evaluated on length, vocabulary level, content, and originality. At both the grade one level and the grade two level, the essays of the i.t.a. sample were longer and at a somewhat higher vocabulary level. Further, in terms of both the Content and the Communication scales, there were statistically significant differences in favor of the i.t.a. group at both grade levels. (Author/WR)

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The Relationship Between Reading Medium and Prose Writing

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of two methods of reading instruction on children's ability to write original compositions. 684 first and second graders (i.t.a. and T.O. pupils) wrote two compositions which were evaluated on length, vocabulary level, content and originality. At both the grade one and the grade two level, the essays of the i.t.a. sample were longer and at a somewhat higher vocabulary level. Further, in terms of both the Content and Communication scales, there were at both grade levels statistically significant differences in favor of the i.t.a. group.

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Introduction

The major emphasis of the research devoted over the past several years to the study of the initial teaching alphabet (i.t.a.) has been, quite naturally, on i.t.a.'s value as a medium for instruction in beginning reading. Reading, however, is only one aspect of the language arts curriculum, and a further value often claimed for i.t.a. is that it facilitates children's writing. The most common explanations given for this phenomena are (1) that the typically higher reading level achieved by the i.t.a. first grader gives him more complex models to draw upon in his written work, and (2) that the consistency of the i.t.a. sound-symbol relationship enables the child to write without concern for the intricacies of spelling in the traditional orthography (T.O.). Thus, at least in these two respects, the child's creative energies may be concentrated on the substance rather than the mechanics of the writing task, and his written work may be brought more closely into line with his spoken expression.

Some research (e.g., Mazurkiewicz, 1966; Downing, 1967) has been done on the comparison of i.t.a. and T.O. in terms of their effect on written work, and the results have almost uniformly tended to favor the work of the i.t.a. samples. The dimensions studied, however, seem to have been restricted to such continua as the number of running words, capitalization, spelling, vocabulary level, etc. In order to investigate not only these but also such other continua as originality and ability to communicate ideas on paper, the present authors undertook a limited study of written work in the first and second grade classes of a metropolitan school district.

The Subject Sample

Eleven first grade and eighteen second grade classes took part in the study. Of the 293 first grade children, 130 (from six randomly selected classes) were receiving their reading instruction (and doing their writing) in i.t.a. while the remaining 163 children (seven classes) were working in T.O. All of the 391 second grade children were in second grade T.O. programs using the Lippincott basal readers, but 155 of them (randomly assigned the previous year) had used i.t.a. through the end of grade one. Both i.t.a. and T.O. classes were located in each of the seven elementary schools of the same suburban school system.

The Work Sample

In that aspect of the study to be reported here, each of the 684 children in the participating classes was given the same two written assignments. In the first of these ("The Puppies"), both a visual and an auditory stimulus were provided. The visual stimulus consisted of a young boy and girl playing with several puppies while the auditory stimulus consisted of the following material read aloud by the classroom teacher:

> I am going to give each of you a picture. We are going to write about it.
> Now look at the picture. We can see a boy, a girl, and some puppies. Who owns the puppies and how did they get them? What are the puupies' names? Who are the children? What are they going to do next?
> On your paper, write a story about what is happening in this picture and what you think of it.

In the second assignment ("The Moon"), given one week later, no visual stimulus was given. Each child was simply provided with a blank piece of paper, and he listened to the following directions given by the teacher:

> On nice days, we can see the sun, and on nice nights we can see the moon. We all know what it is like to live in our city. Now I want you to think about what it would be like to visit the moon. What would you do to get ready for your trip? What would you take with you? How would you get to the moon and what kind of things would you see there? What kind of people might be there and how

would they look? Where would you go to have fun? When would you come back home?

Now on your paper, write a story about your visit to the moon.

The Analysis

Two general kinds of analyses were done: (1) objective "counting" analyses, and (2) subjective rating analyses. Each of these will be considered separately.

The Counting Analyses

The objective "counting" analyses were concerned with two continua: (1) the length of the compositions, and (2) their vocabulary level. The length of the compositions was measured in terms of the number of running words, and the results are given in Table 1. These results indicate that in both Grades One and Two, the i.t.a. children wrote significantly longer compositions than did their T.O. counterparts, but that in Grade Two, the absolute size of this statistically significant difference seemed somewhat dependent on the composition topic and/or the stimulus mode.

The vocabulary level of the compositions was determined by the proportion of difficult words used. A difficult word was defined as a word not on the Stone Revision of the Dale list of 769 Easy Words, and the proportions of such "Difficult" words are presented in Table 2. These data show that the i.t.a. samples in each case used a somewhat greater proportion of

"difficult" words than did the T.O. groups thus indicating a somewhat more advanced vocabulary level. Further, this difference between the groups was statistically significant in each case. Parenthetically, the somewhat higher proportion of "difficult" words used by both groups in the Moon essays is probably simply a reflection of the general advance in space interest since the publication of the Dale List.

The Rating Analyses

The rating scales used were adopted from work done by Torrance(1965) in his studies on creativity and by C.B. Smith of Case-Western Reserve University in his planning for studies of written work in the elementary school. The two major dimensions included were (a) Content and (b) Overall Communication. Content was measured by open-ended scales of originality, use of rhetorical devices, and evidence of emotion and involvement (with one point given for each unusual ending, surprise, use of example, evidence of personal involvement, etc.). Overall Communication was measured on a simple five-point scale (failing, poor, competent, superior) covering the child's general proficiency in the composition.

Prior to rating, both the i.t.a. and the T.O. compositions were typed leaving their syntax intact but correcting any faulty spelling. The raters were six elementary school teachers.

Three grade one teachers rated the grade one work, while three grade two teachers rated the grade two materials. Each "teacher-rater" rated all of the compositions (both i.t.a. and T.O.) at her grade level, and each composition was assigned the mean of the three ratings on each of the judged dimensions. Analysis of data revealed that the correlation between the Content and Communication scales was +.58 for the grade one essays and +.55 for the grade two material. The inter-rater reliabilities for the Content and Communication scales were +.74 and +.82 respectively for the grade one judges and +.73 and +.84 for the grade two raters.

The actual rating results are presented in Table 3. As can be seen from this table, the grade one i.t.a. groups were superior to the T.O. classes on each of the measured dimensions, and although the differences between the group means were not always large in an absolute sense, they were statistically significant in all cases except for the Emotion scale.

In grade two, the results were similar although not quite so consistent. Here, as in grade one, there were no statistically significant differences between the groups on the Emotion scale, and in addition, there were no statistically significant differences on the Rhetoric scale for "The Puppies" compostion. In all other cases, however, there was a statistically significant difference in favor of the i.t.a. as opposed to the T.O. classes. It might also be added, that, as might have been expected, the general level of the grade two work was superior to that of the younger children.

Discussion

In terms of the objective "counting" analysis, the data support the previous research in tat at both the first and second grade level, the i.t.a. essays, as compared with those of the T.O. sample, were both longer and at a more advanced vocabulary level. In terms of the subjective rating analyses, again at both of the grade levels and along virtually all of the measured dimensions, there were statistically significant differences in favor of the i.t.a. group.

A number of limitations must be made explicit. First, there are the possible effects (unmeasured in the present study) of (a) the Hawthorne effect in the i.t.a. classes and (b) the standard use of the Lippincott series in the second grade. Second, it is important to point out that there is a serious question as to the relevance of the Content rating scales. In these scales, one point was to be given for each unusual ending, use of dialogue, evidence of personal involvement with the story, etc., but as shown in Table 3, the mean ratings for many of these content sub-scales were all less than unity indicating that a great many of the compositions were assigned zero ratings. That is, these scales did not seem to be entirely appropriate to the output of these sample groups; more appropriate scales may have yielded some aspects of a different outcome.

In summary, the present data suggest that i.t.a. is an aid in facilitating writing behavior in the first grade, and that this relative advantage is not lost but rather maintained at least until the end of the second grade. Although the full causality of written behavior may be considerably more complex than the medium for beginning reading instruction, the latter is apparently sufficient for considerable differentiation.

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Table 1

Mean Number of Words Per Composition

Composition	Grade One			Grade Two		
	i.t.a. (N=130)	T.O. (N=163)	t	i.t.a. (N=155)	T.O. (N=236)	t
The Puppies	53.94 (10.15)[a.]	31.75 (9.23)	15.85*	63.28 (15.74)	60.42 (12.29)	2.00*
The Moon	47.65 (14.63)	27.35 (11.24)	10.57*	104.25 (34.15)	76.50 (32.63)	7.48*

a. Figures in parentheses are standard deviations

* Statistically significant at the five percent level

Table 2

Proportion of Words Not on the Dale
List of 769 Easy Words

Composition	Grade One			Grade Two		
	i.t.a.	T.O.	z	i.t.a.	T.O.	z
The Puppies	.12	.08	2.24*	.14	.11	2.01*
The Moon	.22	.16	2.78*	.19	.15	2.15*

*Statistically significant at the five percent level

Table 3
Mean Ratings

Composition	Grade One			Grade Two		
	i.t.a. (N=130)	T.O. (N=163)	t	i.t.a. (N=153)	T.O. (N=236)	t
The Puppies Content						
Originality	.40 (.10)[a.]	.14 (.06)	12.00*	.41 (.11)	.27 (.13)	10.00*
Rhetoric	.28 (.12)	.16 (.09)	8.51*	.32 (.10)	.31 (.09)	.85
Emotion	.52 (.40)	.49 (.38)	.27	.39 (.27)	.45 (.32)	1.89
Total	1.20 (.48)	.79 (.36)	8.20*	1.12 (.45)	1.03 (.31)	2.33*
Communication	2.44 (1.10)	2.15 (1.05)	2.23*	2.91 (1.20)	2.68 (1.03)	2.01*
The Moon Content						
Originality	.41 (.16)	.22 (.11)	4.75*	.56 (.21)	.41 (.17)	6.70
Rhetoric	.28 (.11)	.22 (.12)	4.26*	.65 (.12)	.48 (.10)	12.69*
Emotion	1.14 (.73)	1.09 (.76)	.56	1.16 (.45)	1.16 (.63)	.00
Total	1.83 (.54)	1.53 (.51)	5.00	2.37 (.91)	2.08 (.85)	3.18*
Communication	2.64 (1.24)	2.33 (1.13)	2.21*	2.80 (1.21)	2.62 (1.17)	8.14*

a. Figures in parentheses are standard deviations.

* Statistically significant at the five percent level.